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# The Structure of Sustenance

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## The Structure of Sustenance · *Pattiann Rogers*

In the month of March, Albert plans  
An expedition up the eastern side  
Of the nearest mountain.

Kioka says bands of Peruvians coming down  
The mountain have reported seeing flocks of hummingbirds  
In a meadow near the summit, hummingbirds  
With invisible wings, blue-green heads and thumb-bellies  
Of scarlet-orange. Kioka believes the trumpet vines  
That cover the meadow have swallowed the wings  
Of the hummingbirds.

Albert thinks that the hummingbirds, if they exist,  
Have changed themselves into Peruvians with ponchos  
Of blue-green and scarlet-orange thrown over their shoulders,  
That they have come down from the mountain  
To repeat their own legends.

The Peruvians seem to go easily up and down  
The mountain as if they had invisible wings.  
And they themselves say that their women  
Go up to the meadow alone to mate  
With the hummingbirds in May. They claim their babies  
Nurse on trumpet blossoms in the meadow  
Until they are old enough to fly.

According to legend,  
The ancient Peruvian word for nipple is,  
"Sweet-nectared blossom of orange."

Last fall a black-eyed woman by a mountain road  
Gave Sonia a basket of trumpet blossom vines  
And old hummingbird nests. Scarlet-gold yarn  
And bits of turquoise wool could be seen woven  
With spider silk among the threads of the old nests.

Sonia likes to think that hummingbirds are simply  
Scarlet-orange trumpet blossoms clipped from the vine,

Given invisible wings and green tongues, that their bellies  
Are always full of their own honey.

The title of Cecil's most recent oil painting is:  
"Green Hummingbird Tongue Licking an Orange Nipple."

Gordon is looking through his magazines  
For an article entitled "An Analysis of Nectar,  
With a View toward Predicting the Structure  
Of the Creatures it Sustains."

Sometimes Felicia waits beside the lake at dawn  
Until the sky is the exact color of trumpet blossoms.  
Then she imagines she is the wing of a hummingbird  
Caught inside the orange stomach of a flower  
Or a Peruvian baby wrapped in a wool nest, nursing  
At her mother's breast.

"Hummingbirds Speaking with Peruvian Tongues"  
Is the title of an old song without words.

Albert is spending every day now assembling  
And checking his gear. He has ordered bird traps  
And vine clippers. And every night Gordon falls asleep  
Working on his newest book, *Scarlet-feathered  
Flowers and Egg-producing Vines in the Legends  
Of the Upper Andean Plains.*

Felicia has had a telescope mounted at her window  
And will watch for Albert's campfire every evening  
In March. He will set a lone pine ablaze at the summit  
If he has seen hummingbirds or Peruvians,  
And he will shoot an orange flare into the sky  
If either has spoken.

Kioka will accompany him, traveling  
Out of sight without fire.

It's only January.  
"Legend Full of Its Own Nectar" is the name  
Of this winter.